

A COMMUNIST

**The work of the Soviets**  
and  
**the unconfessable war.**



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The revolution of October 1917 has not only destroyed in Russia the beginnings of the parliamentary system, the failure of which in the old „democracies“ of the West is so evident, it has laid the foundations of a new, socialist order. The parliamentary machine is replaced by the Council of workmen, peasants, and soldiers, by the Soviet. The Soviet is essentially different from a parliament. The workmen, peasants and soldiers,—returned by their fellows on ground of a universal suffrage of the broadest, comprising equality of the sexes, but excluding from the exercise of political rights the exploiters of hired labour and the idle—continue to belong to their usual surroundings, to participate in their usual work and, besides, their mandate, issued for a period of six months, may be revoked at any moment. Thus there is no danger of their turning bourgeois. Neither is the Soviet based upon representation of the local or particular interests of parties, of cliques or of persons. It is based upon the vital interests of production. Its members actually represent the organs of production and distribution, by which society is kept alive. The Russian revolutionaries — and only they could have such courage — have daringly swept away the old doctrines of liberalism and the separation of powers, much extolled by Montesquieu. The Soviet, on the contrary, unites in its hands legislative with executive power, and this gives it exceptional strength in self-defence and government in this era of revolutionary transition.

The aim of the Soviets is the immediate realisation of socialism. Those socialists, who

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are not frightened by realisations and who could not consent to await, for perhaps several centuries of imperialist and capitalist evolution, the establishment of some hypothetic collectivism, have blazed themselves at the head of the movement. We have thus entered upon a period of transition towards socialism. It cannot be sufficiently emphasised that we do not believe ourselves to be in a socialistic society here in Russia. It is not in eighteen months of efforts that one can realise a total social transformation if behind one lie centuries of despotism, feudality, bourgeois exploitation and when one is emerging from a war that has ruined and perverted the whole of mankind. The revolutionary system is the offspring of a capitalistic system built upon inconsistencies and antagonisms, which could not but produce in the system succeeding to it inconsistencies, chiefly of a dialectic nature. Russian communism, without losing any of its vigour and uncompromisingness—for it will infallibly perish, should it yield a jot—must adapt itself to extraordinarily difficult conditions of existence. We had neither the necessary preparation for the technical direction of the industries, nor the necessary experience of government legislation and we were obliged to create an entirely new apparatus of supply and distribution of commodities. We were in no wise sufficiently prepared for war, we antimilitarists, aiming at that genuine peace that free and brotherly peoples will establish among themselves. Thus everything had to be reconstructed, on a novel basis, and in so doing we had to overcome the worst and most unforeseen difficulties often with the aid of makeshifts. It will be seen, how at each step we came into collision with the illwill, violence and underhand or open hatred of the two great capitalistic coalitions, the German and the Anglo-French.

The peasant question was one of capital importance. The great majority of the Russian people lives by agricultural labour, and these peasant millions, suffering of perpetual material and moral misery, suffering even in peace-time of periodical famine, found themselves, owing to the war, in a hopelessly desperate situation. Loss of labouring hands in consequence of the great butchery, the collapse of railway transport, „the insolence of office“, the shortage in seeds and agricultural machines—such are the reasons, which brought the peasant, put into clay-grey uniform, to open revolt. They simply demanded „land and liberty“. The parliamentary government of Prince Lvoff could not give them as much,—why, what would the landowners have said? The revolutionary socialists had a fine programme of agrarian reform in readiness: for that reason power passed to them. But they, with Kerenski, put themselves in tow of the liberal bourgeoisie, and at the disposition of the Ally ambassadors. They did nothing towards giving the land to the peasants. Thus it was that they called forth the October revolution, made by workmen and peasants clad as soldiers who understood, that they were to be duped once more. Immediately after the bolshevik victory all large landed estate was expropriated by a decree. The socialisation of the land was accomplished. Local administration passed into the hands of the „committees of the poorer peasantry“. Later on, for the purpose of reorganizing labour on a communistic basis, rural economic communes were founded. „Everything belongs to everybody“. „From everybody according to his forces, to everybody according to his needs“, such were the principles on which agricultural labour was henceforth to be established. In the beginning the struggle between the different layers of the Russian peasantry was very bitter and the most active rôle in it was



naturely played by the poorest peasants and the rural proletariat. An evolution has been accomplished now and the middle peasants, the small landowners not employing hired labour, are gradually drawn towards the new order. We shall see later on, that the greatest difficulties of the peasant question are bound up with the foreign policy of the Soviets, that is to say, with their resistance to world imperialism.

It is the urban proletariat that has given to the revolution its chosen workers and soldiers. It has realised the expropriation without indemnity of the factories, mills and works. This expropriation was not accomplished all at once. It was the workers control in the industries, it was the shop-stewards committees, that led up to it. To-day it is a thing accomplished. It has necessitated a new organisation of labour directed by the Supreme Council of Public Economy (Sovnarkhose). Subdivided into centres of industries: tobacco, paper, textile etc. etc. this organ tries to regulate production and distribution by a uniform scheme. The unheard-of difficulties it has to struggle with may be guessed, as well as the magnitude of efforts needed for building it up during a period of implacable class war. From the point of view of labour, the whole minimum programme of socialism is attained, nay, surpassed. Social assurance against unemployment, sickness and accidents, resolved in principle, begins to work in practice. The professional unions and the „labour exchange“ distribute labour and control its organisation. Workers' control is in force in all branches of industrial activity. The eight-hours' day is the rule, and the majority of government departments grant a six hours' day to their employees. In these days of shortage, workers receive sensibly augmented food rations. The protection of working women and children is enacted with particular care,—during the last

period of pregnancy and the first of nourishing, the working woman is dispensed from labour with the right to full wages. The construction of the distributive apparatus offered the greatest difficulties, overcome by the organisation of cooperatives, of public dining-halls, a tax on food—as there is by the way a legal tax on salary. At the same moment when reactionary bands bribed with Anglo-French gold attack Petrograd tired-out by endless privations, a decree of the Council of Peoples Commissaries establish the gratuitous alimentation of children up to the age of 14.

This profound reorganisation of economic life requires a great development of the means of transport. It is those very means of transport however, that are wrecked, a circumstance that creates in the young Russian republic a situation occasionally tragic. Compared to the other countries of Europe, Russia possesses few railways. During the war she has used up material lavishly. Mobilisation, comprising more than ten million men, gigantic effort kept up during long months, an insufficient technical staff particularly after the civil war and at the present moment the blockade do not allow the regeneration of transport. The purchase of materials, made by the Soviets in Sweden, and which would have saved many thousands from starvation, have been kept back by the intervention of the Allies. Everything that could be done has been done. During the last week the production of the Putiloff works\*), owing to a happy system of premiums, has sensibly risen. The suspension of passenger traffic for a week or two is sometimes taken recourse to in order to facilitate the food supplies of the great cities, but the transport crisis is unfortunately aggravated by the fuel

\*) Engaged in the construction of railway engines and carriages.

shortage. Up to not long ago the mining districts of the Don were held by reactionary bands. The Red Army and the communist volunteers have undertaken to oust them from there. The oil wells of Baku are in the hands of the English. Thus Russia lacks mineral oil.

The gravest question for Russia after the economical one is the question of public instruction. Ignorance and lack of culture must be coped with and the old scheme of instruction recast. A novel principle must underlie education. This is no longer a matter of manufacturing citizens-voters for the democratic-bureaucratic state, but of giving the workers of to-morrow a socialist education founded on labour. „Labour schools“ (*Troodovaia shkola*) that replace primary schools are to develop the capacity for labour and the conscience of the necessity of living by it. Bourgeois parasitism has created a bad mental atmosphere, one of idlers, of profiteers, gossips, to whom labour itself is burdensome. It is for the Communist school to preach the beauty and the necessity of productive effort. The labour school has two grades: 1. primary, 2. special from the point of view of labour but not of profession as yet. Youth will leave it to enter the specialised professional school, the lectures of which can be easily combined with such on general culture. Wide room is given in these schools to manual labour. They are gratuitous and supposed to bear the cost of the students' subsistence during the period of education. The greater part of them take boarding students. All of them deliver free meals, distribute clothing and other necessities of life. Juvenile colonies are organised in the country. The children of the great northern and central cities are even sent as far as the Ukraina, the Ural and Crimea. Many of the

former country houses of aristocracy, palaces and castles of the tsar and the grand dukes are now used as school colonies or places of public instruction. The Winter Palace now gives shelter to no less than three thousand children and Tsarskoe Selo „Village of the Tsar“ has now indeed become Dietskoe Selo „Village of Children“.

What concerns the educational scheme, the far-reaching reforms are being accomplished. The Russian movement tends towards the nationalisation of instruction, a tendency inaugurated not long ago in some countries by modern schools on the initiative of Ferrer,—with the one difference that the rôle of labour as an element of education is more dominating, and that all efforts tend to develop the individuality of the child as a social value, as a conscious member of the community. How train the new staff of teachers? For it is clear that the old one is not up to its task and often even lacks the necessary good will. Much good work has been done in this direction particularly by a widespread organisation of special lectures intended to train within three or six months an army of school-teachers. This, of course, is but an evidently insufficient makeshift. Pre-scholar education is the object of special attention. Widespread post-scholar education is proceeding by the means of grown up schools, spontaneously and ubiquitously organised, and helped and supported by all kinds of measures. There are hundreds of such in the factories, in the administration, at the front. Each of them has its place of reunion, where the members find tea, dailies and periodicals, a library and an atmosphere of comradeship and intimacy. They advantageously replace the public-houses playing so important a part in other countries. Within these clubs, self-educating circles come into being. Their



propaganda is most efficacious. Propaganda trains, containing libraries and book shops serve the needs of the country. The commissariat of public instruction has created a special organ for the popularisation of the higher forms of art, music, theatre, literature, cinematographs: the „Prolet-cult“ that answers to all initiative by supplying the necessary staff and strives to bring into being a movement of proletarian culture. A new society needs a new culture. The old one, produced by a society divided into privileged aristocracy and miserable plebs bears in the greater part of its output, even in the finest and highest, the mark of the injustice and narrow class spirit of the wealthy. Or else it is soiled by the stain of money. Limitless intellectual and moral resources exist in the masses, for whom the revolution has at last opened up the road of the future. Not an hour has been lost in the efforts to rouse those sleeping energies. The entire printing trade under the old bourgeois regime was subjected to business interests. Books were published and sold with the one object of earning money. The Soviets, chiefly those of Moscow and of Petrograd, have organised vast publishing offices that are achieving a tremendous amount of work. Notwithstanding the paper crisis, labour difficulties etc., books and booklets are spread all over Russia by the millions, in careful editions, with artistic finish and at an always attainable price. The socialist classics and the great foreign writers and poets are popularized to a hitherto unheard-of extent. Romain Rolland and Henri Barbusse may perhaps be found more easily in the smallest Russian library, than in many of the cities of France itself. The arts have been encouraged as widely, as the exceptionally difficult circumstances permitted of. We may look with lawful pride on the creative activity deployed by Russian art in these tragic hours.

In Petrograd and in Moscow, at the moment of writing this, gigantic exhibitions of paintings are opened, where thousands of exhibitors demonstrate the several important schools of Russian painting. The revolutionary impetus has of course not failed to produce tendencies sometimes perhaps extreme. „Fauves“, cubists, futurists, symbolists and many others are witness what a strong love of art for arts sake lives in the heart of Russian youth, worn out with nearly five years of war. Maxim Gorki is publishing a kind of literary encyclopedia („Allworld literature“) that is to count several thousand volumes by Russian and foreign authors. Among the volumes recently published let us mention the works of Stendhal. Theatrical life, by having become accessible to the vast public of workers, seems to us to have lost nothing thereby. The Moscow and Petrograd ballet corps give incessant pleasure to thousands of spectators, no longer idlers in frock-coats and society women, but men of toil and action, workmen, employees, soldiers. It is for them, that Shaliapin sings evening for evening in the Mariinski Theatre. When they cannot come to art, art goes to them. Artists are sent to the front and to the country. The two capitals have a dozen of theatres each in full activity, besides a countless number of cinematographs.

The moral and material transformation is far from being achieved, but it has gone far enough to make any relapse impossible. Russia, the land of honours, nobility, titles, ranks and grades, where the pettiest fiscal functionary was councillor of one thing or another, that same Russia to-day knows only citizens or comrades. Russia, lately under the yoke of the orthodox church has less than two years ago separated

the church from the state, and the school from the church. The law forbids religious associations the possession of real estate. But thence does not follow, that religion is persecuted in the least. Quite recently, in answer to antisemitic provocation, the communist party posted a manifesto "To all believers" which said: "as long as there are men who pray, the churches will be respected". This respect of religious feeling does not prevent the struggle against prejudice and superstition by appropriate means, that is to say, by propaganda and by the popularisation of science. Class jurisdiction and the countless parasites it entrained have been abolished. The Peoples Tribunals have simplified their procedure to the strictest minimum.

The proceedings of civic life have been simplified as well. Until the month of March 1917 no marriage, but the indissoluble church marriage could be contracted. At present marriages are registered on a simple declaration of the parties. The latter have the right of bearing the name of the wife, the husband or both. Children not born in wedlock have exactly the same rights as others. Divorce has also been simplified. These are questions intimately connected with the question of women's emancipation, continually held in view. The recent working-women's days have been most interesting in this respect. Woman, conscious of her rights and duties, sure at last of the aid of the entire community for the education of her children, can proceed to found the new family.

Let us at the last mention three newly accomplished important reforms: the reform of orthography, reform of the calendar, and the introduction of the metric system.

It is not one of the smallest apparent inconsistencies of the Russian communistic régime, that it is carrying on a war. Was it not with the cry of "Down with the war! Peace without indemnities and annexations!", that the bolshevik party, the communists, gained their power? Only they could and would give us a peace which by realizing socialism in the present, definitely raised a barrier to the development of the spirit of conquest. But it was even because it was the sole force capable of giving capitalism the coup-de-grâce, that it was regarded as a mortal enemy by imperialism and that the young communist republic, invaded first by the armies of the Kaiser, surrounded, blockaded, besieged and starved afterwards—like some time the French Commune,—by the Allied Powers, was forced to organize an army and a navy, in expectation of the present war. The nucleus of the Red Army was furnished to Trotsky by the Red Guards, a volunteer corps organized by the proletariat and the poorer peasants in the very first days of the social revolution. The Red Army has preserved its class character and is not an instrument of domination or conquest in the hands of the governing few, but a people up in arms to defend not colonies, not territories, not markets, but its naked life and the international interests of the oppressed classes, against the international of the propertied and the rulers.

To recreate an army and a navy in a period of such social crisis, at a time, when the inner and outer enemy left not a moment's breathing-space, was a task of incredible difficulty. It rested in its greatest, most arduous part, on the shoulders of the Commissary of Land and Naval War: Trotsky. And in spite of the incredible difficulties of repair, the Baltic fleet is at present a force that must be reckoned with. Submarines patrol the gulf of Finland. Cronstadt and its



naval garrison serve as a valiant bulwark to the red capital, Petrograd.

The army and the navy needed officers. The officers of the old regime turned traitors, or served, driven by need, against their free wills. Officers must often be technicians and you cannot improvise technicians. The formations had to be reconstructed by the aid of old elements severely watched, controlled and surrounded by new ones trained in the new special schools. In a six-months' training course these schools turn out officers coming from the people, by preference from among tried and proven communists. The first discharges have already seen action at the Archangel, Odessa and Ural fronts and have won their spurs there.

The new army, the nation in arms—that great idea of Jaures for which he died—have found their realisation in far-away Russia. Besides military service, which actual circumstances have rendered necessary and obligatory for all men between 19 and 30, the Soviets have decreed general and obligatory military preparation. Every man ought to be able to defend the revolution. The war weighs heavily on the Russian people. It does not wish it, it is incessantly repeating its desire for peace. For the first time perhaps in history, we see armies—the Red Armies—that fight solely to conquer peace and the right to live in freedom. In order to make them understand their mission, a vast work of propaganda has been undertaken among the soldiers of the Red Army. The Red Army has its clubs, its libraries, its propaganda trains, its papers and special groups of agitators to accompany them. If it has sometimes suffered rebuffs, these have been fully compensated by its successes in Archangel and the Murman Coast, in Nikolaevsk, Cherson, Odessa and the recent great victories over the troupes of Admiral Kolchak.

We must know the important part played by the organized communists, on the shoulders of whom heavy responsibilities are laid. The voluntary mobilization of the party permitted of the sending of hundreds of active workers to the Don region, there to defend Soviet Power.

At every stage, in the course of this hurried examination of the work of the Soviets we have come up against the circle of steel and fire drawn round Russia by the allies. Not long ago the Russian socialist revolution had a single front facing towards German imperialism. To-day the line of its coasts and frontiers form a single front. The Allies are laying siege to Russia. Russia is surrounded, underhandedly and shamefacedly, by the armies and free-lance bands of international reaction. After having, during long months, spread shameless libel against her best sons—who has forgotten, that Lenin, Trotsky, Zinovieff were „German agents“ at the very moment, when they scraped together the last desperate forces of their country to defend it against German imperialism—after having pushed against her, to cut her off from the rich Siberian corn supplies, the unfortunate Czecho-Slovak mercenaries, after having threatened her with a fresh invasion, after having dreamed of organizing against her the international gendarmerie of the League of Nations—the Anglo-French bourgeoisie definitely start the „unconfessable war“. Messrs. Clemenceau and Lloyd George with one voice declare, that there is to be no war against Russia, that not a single man will be sent there (not a single one, maybe, not consenting to be sent) but that all, who wish to reestablish order will be helped and supported by all means at command. Tartuffe has two faces. To the people he says: be satisfied, we will leave the Soviets



alone. To the bourgeoisie he says: they shall be exterminated in spite of all, and we will be there to see it. Such a degree of hypocrisy is new in history. Thus it is that all bandits, all robbers, all plunderers and adventurers, more or less reactionary, get from France, from England and from elsewhere the means of incessantly renewing their attacks on the communistic republic. Lloyd George and Clemenceau,—and at times the double-tongued Wilson as well, support by turns Korniloff, Kaledin, Dutoff—(alas, where are they?)—Semenoff, robber chief somewhere in Asia, Horvat, holder-up of Mandchu railway trains, Denikin and Krassnoff, ex-flunkies of the ex-germanophile tsar, the workmen-shooter Kolchak and the Jew-massacrer Petliura, Pilsontski and his butcher Polish legions, Esthonians, Finns, Baltic barons...

A faithless and a lawless war, undeclared, in which prisoners are shot on sight, in which an entire nation is systematically starved, where the question of right is never raised. The present attack of white bands against Petrograd makes it impossible to deny this war any further. But it is not thus, that a revolution, an idea, a new order can be vanquished. It is thus on the contrary, that bourgeois order, which can only defend itself by violence and hypocrisy, will be disqualified for ever.

**A COMMUNIST.**